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Objects of utility: cultural responses to industrial collections in municipal museums 1845-1914

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Abstract

Between 1845 and 1914 several municipal museums in Great Britain established an industrial collection of objects relevant to local manufacture. The origins of these collections are found in the 1830s and the reform of design education. Industrial collections assigned an economic function to museums and were contested by critics who maintained that museums should be concerned primarily with fine rather than applied art. It is argued that curatorial decisions on the adoption of industrial collections can be evaluated with reference to contemporary debates on art, design education and the relative values of liberal and applied knowledge. Through case studies of the municipal museums of Birmingham and Preston, this paper assesses contrasting curatorial responses to industrial collections. Adopting Matthew Arnold's categories of Hebraism and Hellenism as an exploratory framework, it concludes that industrial collections represented materialistic values associated with Hebraism that were directly opposed to the spiritual values associated with Hellenism.

Key Words: Industry, Objects, Municipal, Arnold, Hellenism, Birmingham, Harris

Introduction

In 1836 the *Report from the Select Committee on Arts and their Connexion with Manufactures* urged government intervention to enable the 'formation of open Public Galleries or Museums of Art' to promote improvement in the design of consumer products and to enhance Britain's economic competitiveness. By addressing the 'want of instruction in design amongst our industrious population' such museums would, as James Nasmyth, a witness to the Committee suggested, lead to 'the extension of the national prosperity in regard to improving our manufactures', an object further emphasised in Charles Cockerell's assurance that they would assist the 'multiplication of industry and commerce'. A further witness, William Wyon, alerted the Committee to the geographically varied nature of British industry, noting that in towns with such diverse industrial bases as Birmingham, Manchester and Sheffield, local museums relating specifically to local industrial manufacture would be necessary (SC Vol. One Q. 1717). While there was little immediate progress in the establishment of the municipal museums that would eventually make such provision, the opening of the South Kensington museum in 1857 marked an important stage in the development of the museum display of industrial art. However, curatorial and political disagreements about the true purpose of the South Kensington museum, arising from the competing claims of fine art and industrial art, prevented its development as an institution devoted exclusively to industrial art (Heleniak, 2000; Kriegel, 2007: 160-98; Wainwright 2002a, 2002b).

The provision of municipal museums to support industry at a local level was enabled by the Public Museums Act of 1845 and while their development lagged behind that of national museums, most large towns had established a municipal museum by the outbreak of the First World War. Several of these housed an industrial collection in the form of an array of objects intended to be of practical utility to their local economy. Such collections ranged from the small

and random which included, for example, objects of industrial art such as small decorative consumer goods and samples of textiles, jewellery and ironwork to those which transcended the boundaries of industrial art by displaying objects of industrial processes and production such as raw materials, engines and machines. While the development of the South Kensington museum and its industrial collections has been widely researched, the responses to industrial collections in municipal museums have, with few exceptions, (Hill, 2000; 2005) been relatively little examined. Although municipal museums were not immune from the cultural and political forces which influenced progress at South Kensington, their development was essentially determined by local factors. This paper offers a preliminary investigation of the differing ways in which municipal museums approached the task of supporting local industrial manufacture and the ways in which wider debates about the cultural significance of industrial collections were mediated through local cultural and political contexts. The following section provides a brief overview of the nineteenth century debate on the functions of art and culture in industrial society and the relevance of this to museum industrial collections. It also discusses the exploratory potential of Matthew Arnold's theories of culture, in particular his interpretations of the cultural outlooks of Hellenism and Hebraism, in the evaluation of museum practice in the display of industrial objects.

Art, industrial art and museums

The origins of municipal museum industrial collections are located in the reform of education for design in the eighteen thirties when, as the *Journal of Design and Manufacture* (1852) commented, Britain awoke to the fact that her industrial productions, though good in material and fabric, were inferior in appearance. The Select Committee on Arts and their Connexions with Manufacture, established in 1835 to address the poor design of British manufactured goods, recommended that a School of Design be established in London, supplemented by provincial schools, museums and galleries, whose object would be to educate workmen specifically in industrial and commercial design rather than in fine art (Davies, 1998; Kriegel, 2007; MacDonald, 2004: 67-88). However, the application of art to manufacture and commerce assigned to it an economic function and engendered a debate about the nature of the distinction – or if indeed there was a distinction – between fine art and applied, or industrial art. Although this debate did not initially focus on museums, the question of whether industrial art was categorically different from fine art later became of central importance to the cultural meanings of museum industrial collections. One broad response to this question held that there was in fact a fundamental distinction; as Charles Lock Eastlake, the first Director of the National Gallery stated in his evidence to the Select Committee on the National Gallery, art could be divided into fine art and mechanical or ornamental art (Siegel, 2008: 141). Consequently, William Dyce, the first Superintendent of the School of Design, argued that industrial art required its own special education and that artisans who aspired to be designers of consumer products should be trained as designers and not as artists. He also insisted that no-one aiming to become an artist, as opposed to an industrial artist, should be admitted (MacDonald, 2004: 151). Accordingly the School's curriculum excluded the painting of portraits, landscapes, historical themes and especially the drawing of the nude in order to focus exclusively on practical design (Sandby, 1862: 233-4). Dyce's educational philosophy was essentially concerned with method rather than art, the sole object of the School being to teach the art of preparing designs for manufacture (MacDonald, 2004: 119). An important aspect of this differentiation was that industrial art was considered culturally and socially inferior to fine art (Davies, 1998). There was, for example, a reluctance within the Royal Academy to recognise designers as artists and it was not until 1855 that engravers were admitted, their prior exclusion having been grounded in a concern to preserve the 'relative dignity of art' (Sandby, 1862: 243).

The second broad response to the industrial art – fine art debate was that there was no essential distinction between them. William Cooke Taylor (1848), for example, believed that artists and manufacturers shared mutual interests and that even the 'highest Art' lost nothing when used to decorate objects of utility while Benjamin Haydon, both an artist and a lecturer on design, insisted that higher order skills in industrial design were best acquired if artisans were trained as artists by formal lectures on high art and the study of the figure within the academy

(Kriegel, 2007: 21-9). In contrast to Dyce, Haydon's educational philosophy reflected an holistic concept of art and a view that the industrial artist should be encouraged to develop an appreciation of taste and beauty. (MacDonald, 2004: 116). Even those who stood to benefit most, in commercial terms by improved design, namely the employing manufacturers, were divided on the question of whether separate training was needed for designers; in Manchester, for example, there was considerable appreciation of the existing art school and opposition to the idea of a vocational school (MacDonald, 2004: 86).

The debate on the reform of education for art and design was of crucial significance to museums and galleries in terms of their display of objects of art and the ways in which these were interpreted. Its scope was not confined to aesthetic considerations only but was complicated by a sub-text concerning the relationships between industrial art and machine production. The spread of machinery was highly contested in the first half of the nineteenth century, not least because it replaced the skilled artisan with automated technology (Berg, 1980:12) and for some critics the issue of art reform also embraced concerns about the social and cultural impacts of machine processes of production. Ruskin (1907), for example maintained that decorative art was not a degraded or 'separate kind of art' and that all art contained the capacity to be decorative, though he remained critical of machine production and of art education which was limited to the designing of patterns capable of being produced by machinery (Ruskin, 1994:192). Both Ruskin (1907) and Arnold (1960) extended the debate on art from aesthetic considerations to a wider critique of the cultural impacts of industrialisation. Both believed art and culture were not to be subservient to commercial industrial production but should serve as a civilising force in a newly industrialised, urbanised and materialistic society. Ruskin however went beyond this to argue that good design was not possible under existing industrial conditions and, in a similar vein, that change in the organisation of industrial society was necessary for 'a town which is doing its best to extinguish the sun itself cannot be benefited by the possession of statues of Apollo' (Ruskin, 1882: 55-6).

The reform of design education clearly raised the question of whether the education of the student designer was best served by separate museum collections of industrial art or by holistic displays incorporating objects of both industrial and fine art. However, in drawing a distinction between the education of the artist and the training of the industrial artist, the debate also raised epistemological implications for museums intending to develop industrial collections because it separated education and vocational training in art in terms of a higher liberal and a lower applied learning (Veblen, 1994: 223-7). Industrial collections did not belong to that domain of knowledge concerned with abstract ideas of beauty or truth but to one concerned with the practical application of technology and design to industrial production and wealth creation. In effect they created an alternative discourse of applied knowledge, industrial manufacture and commerce to that of liberal knowledge, humanism and high culture with which museums had been associated since the Renaissance (Findlen, 1989; Jordanova, 1998: 24-5). As Hooper Greenhill (1992: 5) suggests, nomenclature enables particular ways of knowing and the meanings of industrial collections derived not from their objects but from the ways in which curators classified and labelled them and intended them to be understood (Pearce, 1992; Sherman and Rogoff, 2003: xi). Items categorised and exhibited as 'industrial' became objects of economic utility, manufacture and commerce; their meaning was not inherent but was determined by a curatorial intention to make visible their function in industrial manufacture. For example, cotton bolls or samples of textile design exhibited in an industrial collection were not intended to be seen primarily as objects of natural history or artistic production but as objects of commercial value and elements of industrial processes. If, as Schubert (2000) suggests, a museum had previously been understood to be a storehouse of art that was 'simply a stepping stone towards the pinnacle of Greek classicism', then what Kriegel (2007:4) describes as the interlinking of museums with art, aesthetics and economics endowed them with differing purposes and meanings. This marked a departure from the more widely shared view that the purpose of public museums and galleries was to disseminate high culture as a civilising counter-balance to industrial society (Bennett, 1992, 1995; Duncan, 1995: 4; Koven, 1994; Whitehead, 2005: 5; Woodson-Boulton, 2007).

The epistemological significance of industrial collections outlined above linked them to wider social and cultural questions concerning the relative values of the competing domains of

liberal knowledge and applied knowledge. These were contested throughout the nineteenth century. Carlyle (1870: 106), for example, discerned the Age of Machinery to have created 'two great departments' of knowledge, namely knowledge with a material utility and knowledge of inherent value. The values of liberal knowledge were notably defended by Matthew Arnold in *Culture and Anarchy*, published in 1869, in which he extended Carlyle's metaphor of the mechanical society in arguing that culture, the study of perfection and the underpinning idea of liberal knowledge, was urgently necessary in the contemporary mechanical and external society of nineteenth-century Britain (Arnold, 1960: 49). Industrial enterprise was not a means to human perfection and happiness but was valued only for its own sake (1960: 161-2); the purpose of culture was accordingly to rectify the tendency of the Philistine industrial middle classes to regard machinery and wealth as ends in themselves by enabling knowledge of the 'best which has been thought and said in the world' (Arnold, 1960: 6).

Arnold portrayed the relationship between industrial society and culture in terms of the concepts, or 'ideal types of moral outlook' of Hebraism and Hellenism (Turner, 1981: 20). Hebraism characterised the tendency of contemporary industrial society to adhere to the Puritan tradition of Protestantism and to emphasise doing rather than knowing. It thus reflected a primary concern for utility, commerce and applied knowledge as the means of effecting material progress through industrial manufacture. Hellenism, in contrast, drew on an already established Victorian interpretation of the civilisation of ancient Greece and represented an alternative tendency which placed a higher value on intelligence, culture and liberal knowledge (Arnold, 1960: 129-144). Whereas Hellenism had informed the cultural outlook of the Renaissance, the growth of a commercialised manufacturing society since that period had led to Hebraism becoming the stronger tendency and had positioned industrial enterprise and the creation of wealth as the most valued human pursuits (Arnold, 1960: 160-1). For Arnold, the purpose of culture was to reinvigorate an Hellenistic understanding of culture in order to redress the materialism of the Philistine middle classes and to replace the prevailing belief in the primacy of industrial machinery and external goods with a renewed interest in 'all the voices of human experience' as expressed through art, science, poetry, philosophy, history and religion (Arnold, 1960: 47). The differences between Hebraism and Hellenism thus came to represent those between action and intelligence and between applied knowledge and liberal knowledge, and, as will be argued, suggest a framework within which to distinguish the cultural differences between industrial and fine art collections. Hellenism thus served as an ideological weapon against commercialism and the mechanical society, with the art of ancient Greece symbolizing the imagined humanistic virtues of Greek civilization (Turner, 1981: 17-43). Through their synthesis of culture, art, materialism, commerce and industrial manufacture, these interpretations of Hebraism and Hellenism suggest a way of locating industrial collections and museum practice within an Arnoldian cultural framework and the possibility of evaluating conflicting approaches to the building of industrial collections through this perspective.

The development of industrial collections in public museums

Industrial collections placed museum practice in the service of commerce and industrial manufacture. It is thus possible to conceptualise their function as integral to the maintenance of an industrial economy and to the processes of wealth creation. In this sense industrial collections can be argued to correspond with important characteristics of the outlook of Hebraism such as its emphasis on industrial progress rather than inward reflection, on doing rather than thinking and on applied rather than liberal knowledge. This paper will now review the growth of industrial collections in municipal museums and the ways in which this could be influenced by local mediations of the fine – applied art debate; the following section will in turn discuss similarly negotiated rejections of industrial collections. As a preliminary step it is necessary to consider the development of industrial collections in national museums. These tended to precede those in municipal museums and informed local understandings of museum rationale and practice.

The Exhibition of the Industries of all Nations in 1851 reinvigorated interest in the display of industrial objects as a means of spreading more widely the necessarily limited reach of the schools of design in educating the artisan, and indeed the consumer public, in matters of design

and taste. The objects displayed at the Great Exhibition included not only those categorised as fine art – though several of these included forms with a notably commercial aspect such as wood carving and enamels – but also objects of manufacture and machinery which included samples of the raw products of manufacture and of the machines used in the industrial processes of production, for example minerals, ores, locomotives and cotton machines from Oldham (Fay, 1951). Of particular note was the integrated layout of the displays in which fine art, machines and completed products were spaced intermediately as if to convey the sense of a holistic entity of art and industry. As Greenhalgh (1989) notes, the Exhibition reflected a point at which work became to be seen as the 'central, if not the sole' purpose of life - not simply an economic undertaking but a guiding cultural force of industrial society.

An immediate effect of the Great Exhibition was the establishment of a number of museums devoted to the display of objects of interest and use to industrial manufacture. Henry Cole, who had been a leading proponent of the Great Exhibition, founded the Museum of Manufactures in Marlborough House in 1852 (Fay, 1951:118) through the purchase of several objects from it (Davies, 1998; Heleniak, 2000). This institution became the Museum of Ornamental Art in 1853. The founding of the Industrial Museum of Scotland in 1854 (known as the Edinburgh Museum of Science and Art from 1864) further reflected the burgeoning interest in the provision of public museums of the industrial arts, which culminated in the establishment in 1857, again principally through Cole's efforts, of the South Kensington Museum with its exhibitions of ornamental arts, animal products, science specimens and patent library (Roberston, 2004). The South Kensington museum lent validity to industrial collections and in 1857 Ruskin (1994: 202-3) drew attention to this expanding area of museum work in proposing that every industrial town should have a civic museum with 'examples of unquestionable excellence in that manufacture easily accessible'.

Progress in the establishment of industrial collections in municipal museums was initially slow. As Papworth (1853:13) observed, museums using classification systems based upon the British Museum's four departments of Antiquities, Natural History, Library and Picture Gallery, were taxonomically ill-equipped to exhibit industrial objects as such; museums intending to represent the manufactures of a district should, he advised, consider the Great Exhibition's layout of Raw Materials, Machinery, Manufactures and Sculpture and the Fine Arts. The advantages of local and permanent industrial collections were brought to the fore in criticisms of the failure of the South Kensington Museum to fulfil its original objective of developing collections of practical support to manufacturers of consumer goods (Baldwin Brown, 1902; Burton, 2002). In 1888 Thomas Greenwood (1888: 7), a leading campaigner for free libraries and public museums, promoted the municipal museum as a centre not only for illustrations of the industrious arts but also for the display of raw materials, model machines, the processes of manufacture and finished goods and published a survey of the contemporary provision of industrial collections (Greenwood, 1888:300) which recorded at least ten municipal museums – approximately one fifth of those in Great Britain – as housing a substantive local industrial collection, for example one of textile manufacture and silk at Macclesfield, metalwork and cutlery at Sheffield and electro-deposits at Wolverhampton. It is of note that his chapter on this aspect of museum work was titled 'Commercial Museums', implying a more dynamic role than the passive display of industrial objects. Such Museums might, he felt

collect specimens of manufactures in foreign countries, such as are made in that locality, so that manufacturers and work people may have an opportunity of seeing the particular kind of goods which are in use in the various parts of the world (Greenwood, 1888: 300).

Although the type of commercial museum that Greenwood hoped to see in Britain did not come into being, there was some interest in America where the Philadelphia Commercial Museum displayed not only local products but housed a collection of manufactured products from all over the world so that American manufacturers might be 'properly informed of the markets which it may be possible for them to enter' (Hoyle, 1902; Conn, 1998). Just as the Great Exhibition had influenced the establishment of the national museums of industrial art, later exhibitions, such as the London International Exhibitions from 1871 to 1874 and the Glasgow International Exhibition of Science, Art and Industry of 1888 maintained a practice of displaying industrial

objects as a means of educating the general public in matters of design and production. Greenwood (1888: 26-9) cited the Manchester Exhibition of 1887, with its displays illustrating the various stages of production from the raw material to the perfected article and sections devoted to silk, chemical production and pottery, as a particularly good example of how the working man might be usefully educated in his leisure time and thus a good model for industrial displays in municipal museums.

There was considerable interest in the establishment of industrial collections in municipal museums. Several curators saw them as an ideal way to make their museums more relevant to their local population; W. A. Taylor of Hanley Museum, for example, thought municipal museums should exhibit objects having a direct bearing on the trades and industries of the district while James Yates of Leeds Museum believed they should incorporate technical sections illustrating the manufactures of each town (Greenwood, 1888: 10). W.E.B. Priestley (1902) also felt that the municipal museum 'should be of such a practical character as to help the inhabitants of the city in their commerce, which is their living' while Boyd Dawkins, (1903) curator of the Manchester Museum, more specifically advocated a shift away from exhibiting collections of fine art, which had 'little or no influence on the people', towards those of applied art. The failure of the South Kensington museum to develop what was described as 'proper representation of the industrial and decorative arts of England' was cited as a further reason for the need to have local industrial collections (Baldwin Brown, 1902). The widespread interest in developing local industrial collections reflected not only a dissatisfaction with the services to manufacturing provided through the national museum at South Kensington but also a belief within the nascent museums profession - and particularly, on the basis of the above references, amongst curators in the north and midlands of England - that the purpose of a municipal museum was not primarily to disseminate high culture but to serve a utilitarian economic function through close integration in local manufacture and commerce. There is also, in some of the comments discussed immediately above, evidence of an antipathy to fine art collections on the basis of their perceived lack of utility. It is thus possible to see how, at an early stage in their development, industrial collections began to raise important questions about the purpose of municipal museums and their cultural and epistemological significance.

The establishment of industrial collections in municipal museums depended, however, on a range of local factors which included the approach of local councils, the nature of local curatorial practice, the enthusiasm of employers and the availability of funding. In combination, these factors could provide a strong basis for the development of an industrial collection. Greenwood was particularly impressed by Sheffield's industrial collection which extended beyond objects of industrial art by including technological objects illustrative of local industries in which 'the various stages in the manufacture of files, cutlery and electro-plated goods are shown in the most interesting case'. There were also objects illustrative of the various processes in the manufacture of local and other products, comprising spectacles, telescopes, glass etching, cotton and linen threads, vegetable ivory buttons, corn flour, destructive distillation for gas, paraffin, oils etc., iron and steel, wire, saws, planes, cutlery, files, indiarubber, gutta-percha and tobacco.

This represented, as Greenwood noted, a 'fairly long list of Sheffield industries' and he praised it as one which might enable the 'intelligent lad engaged in any of the electro-plate manufactories' to see old and new methods illustrated (Greenwood, 1888: 92). By 1898 this collection had outgrown its accommodation and the construction of a wholly separate technical museum was under consideration (Howarth, 1898). In Dundee a Technical Museum was established within the Albert Institute in the early twentieth century and organised visits of employees from engineering shops, shipyards and 'industrial employers of all kinds', thus highlighting the importance to the effectiveness of industrial collections of good relationships with employers (MacLauchlan, 1903).

The outstanding municipal industrial collection in Britain was that at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. The development of this collection closely aligned the work of the Museum with Birmingham's commercial and industrial enterprise. The political control of the Museum and its strong emphasis upon industrial art reflected its structural integration within Birmingham's manufacturing economy. Its primary purpose was not to disseminate high culture as a set of alternative and superior values to those of industrial manufacture but to contribute to commerce

and wealth creation through providing access to applied knowledge and objects of industrial art. In doing this it reflected values of materialism and industrial competition which Arnold associated with Hebraism. The building of this collection was influenced by a number of factors, most importantly the nature of Birmingham's industrial economy and the demand by local employers for such a collection. Birmingham's manufacturing base produced the type of small and domestic consumer goods about which the 1836 Select Committee had been most concerned. Its principal products, which included metalwork, jewellery and glass, were more dependent upon good design than heavy industrial products such as steam engines or textiles machinery. Their production depended on skilled artisans working in small workshops rather than large factories and mechanised mass production (Briggs, 1968:186) and industrial art was an essential element of the commercial appeal of the produced goods. Birmingham employers thus had a direct interest in having access to a museum that could help enhance the design of their goods and this led to a sustained demand for a public collection of industrial art that would educate workmen in the design and production of marketable goods. The first public museum in Birmingham was established by the Birmingham and Midland Institute in 1860, partly as a reaction to the unwillingness of the Council to invest funds in such provision. The need for a collection of industrial art was further pressed upon the Council in 1864 through an appeal on behalf of the employers that the Art Gallery might become 'the means of educating the tastes of those upon whom the reputation of Birmingham manufacturers chiefly depends' (Davies, 1985: 15). In 1870 a committee, comprising amongst others W. C. Aitken, a leading industrial designer in Birmingham, John Thackray Bunce, editor of the *Birmingham Post* and John Henry Chamberlain, an architect and connoisseur of craftsmanship, was established 'for the formation of an Industrial Art Museum' (Davies, 1985:12), following which Joseph Chamberlain, a senior member of the council and partner in the screw making firm of Nettelfold and Chamberlain, donated £1,000 for the acquisition of suitable objects (*Birmingham Post*, 1910). Further donations came from employers with a vested interest in an industrial collection including Messrs. Elkington, electro-plate manufacturers and Winfields, lighting and cabinet brass makers. In 1875 the Birmingham glass makers petitioned the council to provide space for the display of a South Kensington loan collection of glass articles 'having skill or artistic merit', noting that the advantage of industrial museums to a manufacturing population had for so long been readily admitted that to repeat the arguments would be superfluous (*Memorial from Artisan Glass makers in Birmingham*, c.1875). A further demand for an industrial museum was made in the same year through a circular published by the embryonic Birmingham Art Guild (1875) which criticised the paucity of current provision for education in art design and appealed for 'thoroughly good Industrial Art Museums suitable to the wants of the locality'. In addition to the sustained demand for an industrial collection and donations from employers of funding and objects, a further crucial factor to the development of the industrial collection at Birmingham was the willingness of the town council to provide one. This was aided by the local municipal commitment to the civic gospel which obliged it to allocate municipal resources to public education (Briggs, 1968:199). The museum was an immediate beneficiary of this philosophy as the first four chairmen of its libraries and museums sub-committee were members of George Dawson's congregation (Woodson-Boulton, 2007), Dawson having himself been a principal exponent of the civic gospel. This combination of socio-economic and political factors contributed to the development of an industrial collection which closely reflected the needs of local industries and, particularly through its initial focus on the encouragement of better design by the skilled artisan, corresponded to Ruskin's idea, expressed in 1857 and some twelve years before the publication of *Culture and Anarchy*, of one in which would display examples of artistic merit in local manufacture (1994: 202-3).

In 1880 the Tangye Brothers, an engineering firm, donated £10,000 to the Council, noting the need for a permanent local collection of art to improve the design of Birmingham manufactures:

It is all very well for critics to exclaim against Birmingham manufacturers and artisans, because of their inferiority to their foreign competitors in the matter of design and manufacture, but what chance have they of improving in these respects? South Kensington is practically as far away as Paris or Munich, while our competitors on the Continent, in almost every manufacturing town, have

access to collections containing the finest examples of art, furnishing an endless variety of style and design.....In making this offer we feel that while it is quite true that we have been the means of bringing a large amount of new trade to the town, we have at the same time received great advantages from our connection with it, and if our gift will help in some degree towards the establishment of an Art Gallery worthy of our adopted town, we shall be amply rewarded for any self-denial we may have made in making it (Borough of Birmingham, 1880).

The Free Libraries and Industrial Museum Committee subsequently approved the building of a new gallery and museum with ample room for displays of works of Fine Art and also "for the deposit of a collection of objects of Industrial Art, in magnitude and in variety to meet the necessities of manufacturers and artisans, by affording instructive examples in the leading departments of Birmingham industries" (Borough of Birmingham, 1881). Funds were to be used principally for the acquisition of objects of Industrial Art with a focus on precious metals, jewellery, brass work, iron work, glass and arms (Borough of Birmingham, 1881).

The control of the Art Gallery was transferred in 1881 from the Free Libraries Committee to a newly formed Museum and School of Art Committee and in 1885 a new Gallery and Industrial Hall were opened. This committee included industrialists with both an economic and a personal interest in art education, such as William Kenrick, a Birmingham hardware manufacturer who later became a director of the Birmingham Guild of Handicraft, and civic leaders with an ideological commitment to education, such as Bunce, who had been instrumental in Birmingham's adoption of the free libraries and museums Acts. This political structure aligned the work of the museum more closely with art education in Birmingham and highlighted the importance of exhibits of industrial objects to the work of the School in which, as its External Examiner W.J. Wainwright commented, the trend was towards 'industrial and applied art, as distinct from the pictorial' (Borough of Birmingham, 1886). As the work of the School closely reflected the industrial processes upon which Birmingham's economy depended, distinctions between industrial art and industrial processes became blurred as it developed a focus on craftsmanship as well as design, supplying instruction in 'all the processes of working in metals, stone, wood, clay, leather and other materials which are either essentially decorative or capable of being used for decorative effect' (Vince, 1902: 188-9). The majority of the students were employed in the city's workshops and attended in the evening, and while Vince makes no specific reference to their use of the Museum's industrial collections, it seems highly likely that, given the importance of seeing objects of good design, they would have accounted for a good proportion of the 629,411 visitors of 1883 (Bunce, 1885: 247). The industrial collection thus acquired a dual function in that not only was it available to the general public, along with other collections, but it also had a direct educational function through its integration with the work of the School of Art.

The industrial collection grew rapidly. By 1892 it occupied a special catalogue of 62 pages (Borough of Birmingham, 1893) and only two years later a new edition of this extended to 350 pages. When in 1894 an External Examiner of the Art School drew further attention to the necessity of industrial art students being acquainted not only with design but also with the processes through which materials were treated, the Industrial Gallery began to display tools and machines, amongst the donations being an engine from Tangyes and drilling machines from Charles Winn and Co. Other donations in this period included a collection of small arms, rifles and military equipment in 1883, examples of modern American metalwork in 1885, the Tangye Collection of Wedgwood ware in 1885, Birmingham Jewellery and metal work in 1887, an electro plating machine in 1887 and a collection of rifles in 1892 (Borough of Birmingham, 1895).

A further factor in the expansion of Birmingham's industrial collections was the curatorial support provided by Whitworth Wallis. The Council had been keen in 1885 to appoint a Keeper for the Art Gallery with experience of the South Kensington museum and Wallis came to Birmingham from his post of Keeper of the Art Collections at that institution (Davies, 1985: 26). One of his first tasks was to travel to Egypt and Italy between 1886 and 1889 to purchase examples of metalwork still produced by hand rather than machine (Davies, 1985: 27). He was responsible for the preparation of the *Guide to the Industrial Art Objects in the Museum* and in

1887-1888 mounted an exhibition of examples of wrought-iron, chiselled iron, steel work, Italian, German and French gold and silver work and jewellery, 'especially bearing upon the art industries of Birmingham.' (Borough of Birmingham, 1888). Wallis also supervised the annual art exhibitions and a 'Special Exhibition of Decorative Art' in 1896 which featured modern tapestries, designs for stained glass, and examples of bookbinding and typography in addition to paintings by Burne-Jones, Ford Maddox Brown and Rossetti. While his personal preference appears to have tended towards fine art, particularly Pre-Raphaelite and other nineteenth-century British artists, Wallis nevertheless oversaw the expansion of the industrial collection and an expenditure of approximately £10,000 on objects of industrial art between 1885 and 1889 and recognised the validity of industrial art while maintaining a policy of acquiring the best possible examples of fine art for the Museum and Gallery (Davies, 1985: 35-44). While objects of utility and of art were in the main displayed separately, they were not seen to be culturally incompatible as the council provided access both to high culture and fine art through its collections of contemporary paintings while simultaneously building and exhibiting a collection of industrial art relevant to the needs of Birmingham's industries (Hartnell, 1995). The motto on the door of the municipal gas office beneath the Art Gallery 'By the gains of industry we promote art' remains today as testimony to the fact that Birmingham's municipal museum exhibited an holistic approach to art and did not portray the values of art and industry as mutually exclusive. However, in an Arnoldian context, such a symbiotic relationship between art and industry was not possible as the purpose of culture was to look beyond machinery rather than to validate it. Culture and art could not serve to support industrial manufacture and wealth creation and yet at the same time claim to embody values which in effect were critical of industrial materialism. The Council's perception of an harmonious relationship between art, industry and the municipal museum in Birmingham is suggestive of an unproblematic inter-linking of culture with materialism. For Arnold, however, culture was at variance with materialism and a 'mechanical conception' of business (Arnold, 1960: 156-7). The Council's understanding of culture and art as being enabled by the profits of industry is therefore evocative of the outlook of Hebraism and its associations with materialism and the machinery of society rather than an Hellenic understanding of culture as an inward condition of the mind and spirit and a questioning of industrial society.

Alternative cultural responses to industrial collections

While the confluence of factors which contributed to the growth of Birmingham's industrial collections was not replicated elsewhere, several other municipal museums provided some type of display of industrial objects. However, as Greenwood's (1888) survey suggests, most museums did not develop industrial collections. Some critics argued that an economic function was inappropriate to a public museum, their views reflecting the philosophical separation of aestheticism and fine art from utility and industrial art that had informed the debate on art reform some decades previously. Gilman (1904) for example, felt that two distinct categories of museum were needed: the artistic, which would be concerned with aesthetic values, and the utilitarian, which would be concerned with practical knowledge. Several curators were similarly sceptical of industrial collections, believing the primary purpose of a museum being to preserve high culture through the display of works of fine art (Ariel-Wright, 1900; Watts, 1908), or as more specifically expressed by Bather, (1903), to encourage aesthetic appreciation but not to provide instruction; as McLaughlin (1907) remarked in his presidential address to the Museums Association, instruction was not necessary as it was impossible for even the most 'stolid persons' to contemplate the achievements of art without their being refined. In other museums, industrial collections failed to develop simply through a combination of lack of interest and funding. This occurred at Blackburn museum, where despite continuous prompting by David Geddes, the Chief Librarian and Curator, a lack of political will on the council, an absence of demand amongst employers and a lack of both funding and donations ensured that beyond a small number of occasional industrial displays, no substantial industrial collection was established (Borough of Blackburn 1868, 1869, 1877, 1892).

The development of the Harris Museum and Art Gallery in Preston provides a revealing case study of an institution in which there was not only minimal interest in the development of an industrial collection but also an intention to take a critical stance against the cultural values

such a collection represented. Its conceptualisation and progress reflected both an embrace of the Hellenistic values of liberal knowledge and humanism and an explicit rejection of materialism and commerce. The design and development of the Harris were essentially determined by its architect James Hibbert and reflected his belief that the purpose of a municipal museum - and this in a town devoted to manufacture and commerce and widely believed to have provided the inspiration for Coketown in Dickens's *Hard Times*! - was to stand as a bulwark against materialism and industrial manufacture. A museum so strongly influenced by one individual may perhaps be argued to have diminished value as a representative example. However the Harris was the result of a clearly articulated vision of what a municipal art museum was for and while an atypical case, was nevertheless one that was expertly informed by the contemporary debate on the purpose of art and competing values of liberal knowledge and applied knowledge.

Preston's first municipal public library and museum were established in 1879 but were not housed in purpose-built accommodation. However, in 1877 Robert Harris, a Preston lawyer, left over £100,000 for the erection of a Free Public Library and Museum and the purchase of reference books for the library and objects of art for the museum (Convey, 1993: 13). The responsibility for the fulfilment of Harris' wishes was delegated by Preston Corporation and the Harris Trustees to a committee chaired by James Hibbert, Chairman of the Free Library Committee and designated architect of the new institution. While the investment of such a degree of authority in one individual sits uncomfortably with modern notions of accountability, it nevertheless ensured that Hibbert possessed the political power to exercise considerable individual control over the development of the Harris building, which was described as one of the finest provincial athenaeums in Europe with singleness of purpose in its application of Greek principles and forms to modern values (*Preston Guardian*, 1903). Hibbert entered the Preston Town Council in 1871 and became Alderman in 1874 (*Preston Guardian*, 1898). Acknowledged as 'by far and away the best debater in the Council' and as possessing expert knowledge of the history of art, he was intellectually and politically well-positioned to lead the development of the Harris, and in the phrase of a local newspaper, 'his personal predilections in matters of art dominated everything' (*Preston Guardian*, 1903). His philosophical understanding of the purposes of a municipal museum and art gallery is clearly articulated in his *Notes on Free Public Libraries and Museums: a Report to the Harris Trustees and the Corporation of the Borough of Preston* (Hibbert, 1881) and in three privately printed works published between 1880 and 1902: *A general view of the materialistic philosophy* (1880a); *A tract for the times: reflections on politics, sociology and religion* (1886) and *Monimenta: remains in prose and verse of James Hibbert 1849-1902*. The unifying theme of these works is their articulation of the value of liberal knowledge and its embodiment in the cultural inheritance of classical civilisation and the Renaissance. All are clearly influenced by the work of Matthew Arnold and particularly the purpose of culture as expressed in *Culture and Anarchy* (1960). In *A general view of the materialistic philosophy*, for example, Hibbert lamented the tendency for industrialisation to lead to a materialistic world view, arguing that 'idealism and materialism are separate shores', while in *A tract for the times* he noted that while industry led to material wealth, only the 'higher branches of learning' could develop intelligence.

Hibbert's belief in the superiority of Hellenistic values to those of Hebraism and in the spiritual value of culture and art to resist the evils of industrialisation was a fundamentally important factor in his planning and design of the Harris Library, Museum and Art Gallery. In *Notes on Free Public Libraries and Museums* (1881), for example, he declared the aim of the new Harris institution to be to provide a 'comprehensive permanent foundation for the encouragement of Learning, the cultivation of the Arts and Sciences, and the free diffusion of a varied Literature'. The Harris would, in Hibbert's (1880b) view, provide an opportunity for everyone to know the masterpieces of sculpture and schools of painting and to 'learn to experience something of their pleasurable and elevating influences'. In *A Tract for the times* (Hibbert, 1886: 113) he echoed Arnold's concerns about democracy and material populism, commenting that the modern progress of Europe would have been impossible without the intellectual inheritance of Greece. His report on the proposed library and museum made an almost literal use of arguments developed in *Culture and Anarchy*, for example that immense majority of the people were 'absolute barbarians in all manners of arts and letters', and that art

and literature should be enlisted both to safeguard against low forms of sensual indulgence and to develop aesthetic sensibilities (Hibbert, 1881). Seeming to cast himself as one of Arnold's (1960: 109) aliens – the elite capable of understanding and appreciating works of high art – Hibbert assumed the role of 'one superintending and directing mind' of not only the design of the building but also of the determination of its function through the selection of the objects to be displayed (Hibbert, 1902). He approached these tasks purposefully noting that:

To form a Museum of Art is not altogether a simple matter. The first consideration is as to the uses and objects; above all the educational; in the higher sense, which in most cases is the chief object (Hibbert, 1884: 73).

The immediate impact of this sentiment was the neo classical design of the building which remains testimony to Hibbert's dictum that the exterior of a truthful building should never be at variance with the plan and purpose of the interior (Hibbert, 1902: 65-7). The building itself gave meaning to its collections through the cultural statement it offered to the visitor. Through the association of its Hellenistic design with Greek concepts of idealism and truth, the building was a material statement of its intended purpose. Its style, described by Pevsner (1969: 196) as 'almost unbelievably late' for its date was consciously chosen to reflect the Hellenistic values it sought to uphold. The adoption of a style that was not at this time as fashionable as it had been earlier in the century served to emphasise the meaning it was intended to give to the building; Barton (1901), for example, commented in the *Magazine of Art* that the design of the Harris had been highly successful in the application of pure Greek forms and had captured the essential spirit of Greek Art. Hibbert (1885) himself noted that although the design of the building was relatively uncommon for the period, it was of the foremost importance that it should not adhere to fashion but should reflect the purpose of the Library and Museum as a repository of the arts and Hellenic values. Dubbed locally as the 'Preston Acropolis' (*Preston Guardian*, 1892), the Harris occupied a commanding elevated position in the town centre, an embodiment of Hibbert's (1881:103) view that

'the monumental art of Greece and Rome speaks a language, the subtlest excellencies of which can reach and be appreciated by thousands of every race and clime'.



Fig 1. The Harris Public Library, Museum and Art Gallery, Preston.

Hibbert believed that industrial production devalued crafts and skills and that manufacturers failed to recognise the humanist values inherent to Hellenism because they sacrificed the skill

and freedom of artistic expression of the individual artisan craftsman in order to increase profits through machine production. As he argued, 'an aristocracy of plutocrats, of manufacturers, will certainly not be a change for the better, for its foundation must necessarily be the dependence of the workman'; thus, the sub-division of labour through mechanisation diminished the workman's dexterity and had created a situation in which 'the artisan retrogrades' (Hibbert, 1886: 216).

Nothing in the design or external decoration of the building suggested a connection to Preston's industrial production or commerce. Instead the Harris was dominated by a pediment 'The Age of Pericles', planned by Hibbert and sculpted by Roscoe Mullins (Convey, 1993: 25), which included Socrates, Zeno, Parmenides, Pindar, Herodotus and Anaxagoras holding a scroll with the word *nous* or intelligence.



Fig 2. The Pediment, Harris Public Library, Museum and Art Gallery, Preston

The Hellenistic intentions of the Museum were clearly indicated in four inscriptions around the entablature: the Dedication 'To Literature, Arts and Sciences'; the Declaration 'On Earth there is nothing great but Man: in Man there is nothing great but Mind; the Precept 'Reverence in Man that which is Supreme' and the Promise 'The mental riches you may here acquire, abide with you always'. The interior of the building made much use of open space, notably a rotunda, above which a lantern allowed sky light to enter the central interior of the building, and extensive use of classical columns.

Hibbert was also responsible for the selection and acquisition of the objects to be displayed in the museum and gallery. Although he had initially acknowledged the importance of industrial objects in museums (Hibbert, 1881), there was limited interest in their display. Industrial art was not totally neglected and there was an exhibition of scientific objects at the opening of the building, which included a range of electric meters, domestic electrical

appliances and a piece of a submarine cable (Convey, 1993: 34-5). In the main, however, acquisitions reflected an emphasis on art rather than on the raw materials and industrial processes of Preston's cotton industry, with the first purchases for the Art Division being bronze and plaster reproductions of Greek, Graeco-Roman and Renaissance statuary (Barton, 1901). While a South Kensington loan collection of electrotype reproductions, specimens of pottery, Indian and Persian fabrics and Indian industrial art was obtained in 1892 (Borough of Preston, 1892) a grant in aid from the department of Science and Art in the same year was used to purchase art objects with little immediate industrial relevance, amongst them plaster casts of the *Venus of Ostia* (Rome, 1st or 2nd century BC) and the *Dancing Faun* of the Naples Museum (excavated at Pompeii and thought to have been previously imported from Greece). Other purchases included 'original drawings and sketches by Continental Masters from the Period of the Revival of the Art of Painting in Europe, about AD 1400' which included, for example, two drawings by Giovanni Gaddi (died c.1383), Italian School, unnamed works by Lelio da Novellara (1511-1587) and Filippo Baldinucci (1624-1696), also of the Italian School, and unnamed works of the Dutch School by Hendrick Goltzius (1558-1617) (Borough of Preston, 1892). The acquisition policy prioritized fine art, particularly reproductions of classical and Renaissance masterpieces which Hibbert preferred to representative Victorian sculpture. In his view, modern works of an ephemeral reputation were to be avoided as the first aim of a municipal art gallery was that it should be the means of 'educating and purifying the public taste' (Hibbert, 1881: 100). Through a meticulous process of cultural selection the Harris became a celebration of fine art and liberal knowledge, the collections and objects displayed being chosen for their propensity to 'challenge the prosaic imaginations of the money-seeking age' (Hibbert, 1881: 103-6). Hibbert (1881: 108) was critical of the arrangement of industrial collections in other museums and preferred a more holistic method on the basis that this would engage artist and artisan equally:

When our museums are so arranged that artist as well as artisan workers, in all the branches of industry whose existence is so dependent on art-inspiration, can, with ease refer each to the separately and chronologically arranged specimens of his own particular pursuit, then we may hope to obtain from them the practical advantages they can be made to offer.

The history of art was accordingly represented through the Greek and Assyrian displays on the upper floors which included casts of friezes and metopes from the Parthenon and the Temple of Apollo Epicurios, and reproductions of Renaissance art on the ground floor which included a replica of Ghiberti's *Gates of Paradise*. Reproductions of classical and renaissance art were always preferred to original new work and as Hibbert (181: 106) noted, imitations sufficiently good to suggest their matchless perfection can easily be multiplied and the mind and aesthetic sense of our growing youths might thus be impressed at the most critical period of their lives. Other examples of classical art were the several plaster and bronze reproductions of sculptures, again purchased from the South Kensington Museum, which included the *Venus de Milo*, *Mars and Apollo* and what the museum's annual report (Borough of Preston, 1890) described as 'Monuments of the Renaissance' which included Michael Angelo's [sic] *Guiliano de Medici with Day and Night Figures* and Moses, Della Robbia's *Annunciation* and Rosellino's *Madonna and Child*. (unfortunately no further details of any of these sculptures were recorded in the reporting of these to the Library and Museum Sub-Committee). One further statue from this purchase – a reproduction of the *Flying Mercury*, the original of which was made by Giovanni da Bologna in 1564 – currently remains on display in the Museum. The statuary also featured what the *Preston Guardian* referred to as a 'colossal' statue of *David* and other reproductions of Michelangelo's works (Convey, 1993: 19-34).

As an initial step in forming the collections of paintings Hibbert recommended the purchase of chromolithographs of the Old Masters which would be 'of greater value in educating the public taste than those mediocre specimens of the works of living artists which form the greater part of our annual exhibitions' (Hibbert, 1881: 202-3) though after James Newsham's bequest of early Victorian paintings purchased at Royal Academy exhibitions the Harris began to buy contemporary art in 1896. Although this may appear to be at odds with Hibbert's

preferences, it nevertheless helped realise his ambition that the Harris should become a regional centre for art collectors (to which end a covered entrance to allow safe access by a horse and carriage was a feature of the design of the building). Through regular changes of the exhibition of works of fine art, this proved a successful strategy, the Museum's report for 1898 recording that the more carefully chosen acquisitions had increased interest amongst the more 'select visitors' who might 'be described as connoisseurs' (Borough of Preston, 1898).

In nearly every sense the Harris Museum, Library and Art Gallery was Hibbert's creation, both in the architectural style and design of the building and in the nature and purpose of the collections and displays. His single-minded determination is illustrated in the fact that the library committee was unable to intervene in the completion of the pediment as the contract to produce it precluded interference between the artist (Hibbert) and the sculptor (Convey, 1993: 26). Despite his success in securing his chosen design, Hibbert became disillusioned with the Harris project, seemingly wearied by the efforts of realising his vision and commenting that he had felt 'somewhat a Ghost moving amidst a company of very questionable Simulacra' during his period of association with the institution (Hibbert, 1902: 97). His retrospective comment that he was less surprised that he had not been permitted fully to complete the project than that he had 'been permitted to do so much' supports the view that the Harris was not a reflection of the wishes of the Council, nor of the manufacturers who served on the library and museum committee, but rather of a well-informed personal vision and an opportunity to realise it. Whereas there was an harmonious co-existence of art objects and industrial objects in Birmingham's museum,

The Harris was essentially devoted to fine art and liberal knowledge and, as can be seen from Hibbert's writings, was intended not to be an institution to support local industry and commerce but to be an emphatic cultural rejection of technical knowledge, industry and materialism. At one level the design of the building and the selection of its contents represented an aesthetic preference but underpinning this preference was a conscious desire to portray what Hibbert (1885) referred to as 'the supremacy of Athens as the great centre of Hellenic culture'. This had been Hibbert's intention from the first for as early as 1885, eight years prior to the opening of the building, he recorded that the intention and meaning of the entire structural design, both externally and internally, was an endeavour to recall, uphold and carry onward the tradition of Hellenic art (Hibbert, 1885). The Harris was in effect a defiant statement of Hellenistic values, intentionally conceptualised as a challenge to the Hebraist values of the industrial manufacturing base of Preston and British society more generally. In an Amoldian context, the Harris could not logically demonstrate a serious commitment to local manufacture or the development of an industrial collection without undermining its stated and principal purpose. In contrast to Birmingham's museum, culture was understood not as an aesthetic reward for entrepreneurial success but as a spiritual and idealised alternative way of thinking about the world. The influence of Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* on Hibbert's understanding of the purpose of art and culture demonstrates the potential impact of contemporary cultural discourse on museum practice and reinforces the fact that this was not culturally neutral.

Conclusion

The cultural significance of industrial collections in municipal museums in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries derived from the mid-nineteenth-century debate on the education of industrial artists and the social and cultural impacts of industrialisation. The validity of industrial collections was contested within the museum profession with conflicting opinions reflecting differing valuations of fine and industrial art and the corresponding epistemological separation of liberal and applied knowledge. The case studies of the municipal museums of Birmingham and Preston show that these distinctions were locally as well as nationally mediated and could exercise a marked effect on the nature of municipal museum practice. At one level, these museums reflect the opposing tendencies of the debate on art education; Birmingham's development reflected an essentially holistic view of art and a welcoming acceptance of its economic utility while the Harris museum in Preston valorized fine art and drew clear cultural distinctions between this and industrial art. Arnold's interpretations of Hellenism and Hebraism suggest ways of appraising the progress of these museums in a wider cultural

context. In their synthesis of dualistic concepts of culture and materialism, industrial enterprise and inward contemplation, machinery and humanity and liberal and applied knowledge, Hebraism and Hellenism enable industrial collections to be seen as structural elements of the machinery of industrial society and thus as agents of applied knowledge, economic growth, wealth creation and materialism. Fine art collections, on the other hand, and especially those emphasising the art of classical civilisation and the Renaissance, reflected an understanding of culture that transcended the materialism of industrial society by maintaining a detachment from the everyday, through representations of liberal knowledge, idealism and beauty. Writing in 1862, some years before the publication of *Culture and Anarchy*, Richard Owen (2008), Superintendent of Natural History at the British Museum observed that manufacture, invention and machine production were well and good, but it was not to be forgotten that 'truth is something more important, more valuable, more enduring'. This sentiment succinctly captures an important aspect of the relationship between culture and society conveyed through Arnold's concepts of Hebraism and Hellenism. The municipal museums of Birmingham and Preston, through their response to industrial collections, reflected radically differing ideas of what municipal museums were for and suggest that the reconciliation of notions of civilisation and productivity, or culture and money that museums might hope to achieve (Hill, 2005: 47-8) might be, but was not always, considered to be possible.

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